



National Park Service
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Sequoia & Kings Canyon
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Burning in Phases to Reduce Smoke

One of the main challenges associated with doing a large prescribed fire in a national park is managing the amount of smoke that will affect local people and communities. To be successful, fire managers must be creative in finding ways to burn safely and protect human health at the same time.

In the fall of 2005, Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks completed not just one, but two large prescribed fires in the Mineral King area totaling approximately 2,400 acres of forested landscape. Managers devised a dual strategy for the Highbridge and Highbridge East Prescribed Fires that allowed the burns to happen while reducing smoke impacts for park visitors and two small mountain communities.



Personnel dropped ignition devices called fuses out of a helicopter to ignite the Highbridge projects.

“The first thing we did was plan the burns for after Labor Day,” said David M. Allen, District Fire Management Officer for Sequoia National Park. “Shifting to the fall means that fewer visitors, residents, and businesses will be impacted since many leave the area after the summer season.”

Once the burns were scheduled for the fall, the parks then began working with the local Air Quality District to further reduce potential smoke impacts by igniting in phases. They devised a clever and flexible solution which met the needs of the parks, the Air District, and local residents.

Here’s how it worked – The 1,500-acre Highbridge Prescribed Fire was ignited for two days beginning October 6. After a five-day break to let air quality conditions improve, the parks finished the remainder of the unit in three days. The 900-acre Highbridge East Prescribed Fire occurred in much the same way in the following weeks.

“We burned nearly 2,400 acres over the course of one month in one area,” said David Allen. “Planning to reduce smoke effects was the key to our success; without that planning the benefits of the prescribed fire might not have been possible.”

Since most of the Highbridge project area had not burned since the park was established, the burns reduced fuels and restored the natural role of fire on the landscape. The burns also reduced wildfire risk for local residents and park visitors along the Mineral King Road.

www.nps.gov/seki/fire/portal/portal.htm

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